

Performance Conversation Resource Guide



About this Guide

In Laboratory focus groups and surveys, employees consistently ask for more performance and development conversations. This Guide provides tips and resources to help you take advantage of this unique opportunity to help build your relationship with your employees.

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Annual Performance Review Conversations

Objectives

- Help the employee understand your performance feedback.
- Clarify performance expectations.
- Help the employee develop/refine performance and development goals for the coming year.

What to Do in Advance

- Conduct ongoing performance and development discussions throughout the year, so that the annual review discussion is not a surprise.
- Send the written review to the employee two days in advance of the conversation.
- Review the position description, self assessment, and your written review.
- Think through the key messages you want to convey.
- Identify specific examples of performance strengths and areas for development.
- Review the Guidance Sheet for completing the Annual Performance Review Summary Form.

Getting Started

- Explain what the two of you will discuss:
 - Review top accomplishments
 - Discuss strengths and areas for development
 - Set next year's performance goals
 - Discuss any issues/needs the employee wants to raise
- Emphasize that you want this to be a two-way conversation.

Discussion Tips for Annual Performance Review Conversations

Topic	What to Cover	Questions for Discussion
Goals/ Performance Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acknowledge your agreement with the goals listed on the Self Assessment for the year being reviewed; discuss any differences in your perspective and come to agreement. Ask the employee to describe his/her top three accomplishments. Share your own perspectives, noting the impact of the employee's accomplishments on Laboratory, Division and/or group goals. Discuss any performance issues, improvements the employee has made, and the most critical areas to focus on for the coming year. Discuss safety accomplishments and/or issues. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What successes and challenges did you experience this past year regarding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding, budgeting and/or staffing? Relationship with funding program manager, DOE or UC representative, or Laboratory management? Collaborations with other colleagues, divisions or institutions (i.e., negotiating roles, establishing teams, linking with division/Laboratory goals)? Service or committee work? For scientists: publishing, patents, and/or invited talks? Why do you think X was so successful? Why do you think X problem took place, and how can you improve the situation in the future? If you had unlimited resources, how would you approach this? If all your resources were cut, how would you approach this? How can I support you in addressing these issues?
Strengths/ Areas for Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask the employee to describe his/her top three strengths, then share your own perceptions. Ask what areas the employee would like to focus on for job development, then share your own perceptions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What key qualities or skills do you bring to your work that enhance your results? Where do you feel you need to develop in your job, and how would this improve your performance? What do you think your next development steps should be?
Setting Next Year's Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acknowledge your agreement with the performance and job development goals listed on the Self Assessment, or Discuss any differences in perspective and reach agreement. Explain the link between the employee's performance goals and Laboratory, Division and/or group goals. If the employee is interested in career development, have him/her complete the Career Development Plan Form. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you anticipate any barriers to achieving this goal? If this happens, how will you respond? What resources or support do you need from me?

Ongoing Performance & Development Conversations

Objectives

- Check in on performance against goals and expectations.
- Provide performance feedback.
- Refine goals/clarify expectations as needed.
- Identify and address any needs that the employee raises.

What to Do in Advance

- Review goals and performance expectations as needed.
- Think through the key messages you want to convey, focusing on strengths, areas for development, opportunities and challenges.
- Identify any examples you want to point out.

Getting Started

- Explain the purpose of the conversation:
 - Quick check-in or
 - More formal mid-year discussion
- Emphasize that you want this to be a two-way conversation.

During the Conversation

- Concentrate fully on the employee.
- Listen not only to the employee's words, but also to body language and tone.
- Be aware of your own body language and tone.
- Learn to be comfortable with silence – give the employee time to think.
- Be open to and curious about unexpected outcomes.

Discussion Tips for Ongoing Performance & Development Conversations

Note: Choose relevant topics and questions from this chart depending on whether this a quick discussion or more formal.

Topic	What to Cover	Questions for Discussion
Giving Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask for the employee's perspective first. • Provide positive as well as constructive feedback. • Be specific: describe facts, behaviors, or actions. • Cite specific examples to clarify your points. • Check for understanding. • Focus your attention on the employee's needs. • Paraphrase what you hear; check to see if your interpretation is correct. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What's happened since the last time we met? • What worked well? • What have you learned? • What strengths contributed to your success with that assignment? • Why do you think X problem took place, and how can you improve the situation in the future? • How can I support you?
Identifying Potential Solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help the employee explore solutions to address any issues identified. • Offer encouragement and support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What's possible here? • What have you tried in the past? • What have you observed works for others? • Are there other possibilities you would consider? • How do you think [idea] would work? • Of all the options, what's most compelling?
Discussing Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and revise goals if needed. • Ask for the employee's perspective on any goal revisions. • Discuss any differences in perspective and come to agreement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your timeline? • What resources do you need? • How can I help you succeed?
Getting at Root Obstacles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help the employee to identify potential obstacles and explore solutions. • As needed, review obstacles that have come up in the past, focusing on lessons learned rather than blame. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What might interrupt your progress toward this goal? • When does this problem come up for you? • Why is it difficult to solve? • How would you like it to be? • What resources do you have to address it, and how can you use those resources to help bring about a solution? • What can I do to help?

Addressing Performance Conversation Challenges

Supervisor Does Not Oversee Employee's Day-to-Day Work

Use these tips when you want to take a more collaborative approach to the conversation because you are not specialized in the employee's field, have more of a collegial relationship with the employee, or the employee is matrixed to another group.

- Convey that the conversation is an opportunity to acknowledge the employee's contributions and brainstorm together about any challenges.
- Discuss any new Division or group strategies or discoveries that might influence or change the employee's goals.
- Ask questions such as:

For Scientists

- What have been your most important research findings?
- Where have you secured new or extended funding?
- Who are you creating new collaborations with?
- What qualities do you bring that have contributed to your accomplishments?
- What feedback have you received on your publications and talks?
- What proposals are you working on?
- What challenges are you experiencing?

For Non-Scientists

- What have been your most important accomplishments?
- Have you worked on any Laboratory process improvement efforts or committees?
- Have you received any awards, obtained speaking engagements, written articles or made any other professional or community service contributions?
- What qualities do you bring that have contributed to your accomplishments?
- What feedback have you received on your work?
- What challenges are you experiencing?

Employee Feels Rating Is Too Low

- Make sure the employee has a chance to feel fully heard: listen to his/her objections and paraphrase (without agreement).
- Clarify the goals, expectations, and performance that led to the rating.
- Cite specific examples as needed.
- Focus on ensuring the employee understands the rating – not on gaining agreement.
- Convey the specific changes the employee would need to make in order to receive a higher rating next year.

Quiet Employee

- Ask open-ended questions to draw the employee out, such as:
 - What ideas do you have?
 - Tell me more about that...
 - How will this enhance your success?
 - Why do you feel this is the best approach?
 - What are the benefits and risks of this idea?
 - What challenges do you face?
 - What else might you do?
 - Can you give me an example of what you mean?
 - Why do you think this is important?
- Give the employee time to think, rather than filling in every moment with talking.

Not Delivering Results

- Make sure the employee understands the exact gap between desired and actual performance.
- Listen for new information -- be open to issues that you can address to help the employee improve performance.
- Make sure the employee has the time, tools, equipment, authority, training and support to do the job.
- Set realistic improvement goals.
- Discuss the situation with your HR Division Partner.

Lack of Innovation and Originality

- Clarify expectations.
- Hold brainstorming meetings, inviting employees to work together to generate ideas.
- Follow up on ideas with the group and individuals to encourage further exploration.
- Focus on the learning points of failed ideas, rather than blame.

Isolated Performance Issue

- Narrow the issue to the specific problem or concern.
- Write down the behaviors/issues that concern you.
- Track the frequency and identify the impact.
- Determine whether the employee has a logical reason for the issue.
- Provide specific, behaviorally-oriented feedback to the employee.
- Avoid judgmental words and phrases like “weakness” or “problem”; instead, present this as an opportunity for development.
- Explain what behavior is needed.
- Discuss the situation with your HR Division Partner.

Disengaged in Work

- Identify specifically how the lack of engagement impacts the employee’s performance.
- Clarify the consequences of continued performance issues.
- Explore with the employee the reasons for his/her lack of engagement.
- Address any issues the employee raises if possible; be honest if you cannot address them.
- Establish short-term goals with a high probability of success.
- Reinforce desired behaviors and effort.

Lack of Skills or Experience

- Identify development resources to address the employee’s needs (see pages 9 to 12 for ideas).
- Suggest appropriate experiences, explaining how they would be relevant to the employee’s work or development goals.
- Be open to the employee’s response. Work together to agree on relevant experiences.
- Follow up with the employee to obtain feedback on skills and knowledge acquired.
- If needed, adjust the employee’s assignments so that he/she has the opportunity to apply the new skills and knowledge.

Development Resources

The following resources can be accessed via the Berkeley Lab Learning Institute Website at www.lbl.gov/BLI.

	Collaboration	Discovery & Innovation	People Development	Expertise/ Knowledge	Self Development	Strategic Orientation
Examples of SkillSoft Online Learning Course Topics						
Conducting Meetings	x	x	x		x	
Cross Cultural Relationships	x	x			x	
Delegation			x	x	x	
Desktop Computer Skills				x	x	
Interpersonal Communications	x	x			x	
Leadership Development		x	x		x	
Problem Solving		x		x	x	
Project Management				x	x	
Supervisory Skills		x	x	x	x	
Time Management				x	x	
Strategic Thinking					x	x
Examples of SkillSoft Online Books						
<i>Choosing the Future: the Power of Strategic Thinking</i> by Wells					x	x
<i>Learning to Think Strategically</i> by Sloan					x	x
<i>Creating a Culture of Collaboration</i> by Schuman	x					
<i>675 Ways to Develop Yourself and Your People</i> by Alexander			x	x	x	
<i>Giving and Receiving Performance Feedback</i> by Garber			x	x		
<i>Coaching for Peak Employee Performance</i> by Foster/Seeker			x	x		
<i>Leadership Presence</i> by Halpern/Lubar					x	
<i>The Craft of Scientific Presentations</i> by Alley				x	x	

Off-Site Courses

The following training vendors offer a variety of off-site courses on topics such as presentation skills, business writing, interpersonal communications, and supervision and can be found on the BLI website [here](#), under Employee Resources:

- American Management Association
- Institute for Management Studies
- National Seminars
- University of California Extension

On-the-Job Experiences

Development does not just mean training. When working with your employees on development goals, consider experiences such as the following.

On-the-Job Experiences

Take on a particularly difficult project, such as a complex task or problem, or a previous project that failed.
Seek out critical feedback on your performance and how it might be improved.
Take on a departmental responsibility that requires learning a new skill.
Assume responsibility for building bridges with a key stakeholder.
Manage a project from start to finish.
Help launch a new initiative, program or business.
Shadow or mentor someone who works in a different division. Learn other areas of the Lab.

Organizational Experiences

Improve a process, policy or longtime practice that will have change implications across multiple functions or at a department, division, or Laboratory-wide level.
Analyze the current strategic plan of a group, department, or division for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and barriers to success.
Review your division's or project's budget and make recommendations for cutting costs and/or financial strategies to maximize quality and efficiency.
Solicit feedback from peers, direct reports and key constituents regarding a specific program, process or key strategic initiative.

Leadership Experiences

Become a mentor to another employee.
Lead a project team or manage a group where team members are experts in the field and you are not.
Lead a project that requires scientific or operational innovation.
Lead a task force to solve difficult organizational issues/problems.
Lead a division- or Laboratory-wide project or task force.
Lead a major change initiative with policy and communication implications.
Teach a process or course to the team or others.
Represent your division on the Laboratory Diversity and Inclusion Council.
Participate in a focus group or user group to help improve a Laboratory process.

Professional Experiences/Relationships

Obtain a degree or certification using the Lab's Tuition Assistance Program.
Attend conferences, workshops, or networking functions.
Cultivate relationships in other national laboratories, industry or academia.
Seek others' feedback, opinions, consultation and collaboration; invite others to lunch/coffee.
Respond to others when asked for feedback, consultation or collaboration.
Tap the potential of social networks like listservs, LinkedIn or Twitter.
Ask to be nominated for the Laboratory's Leadership Development Program.